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Human resources management

Activities of the Ethics Office

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/254, entitled "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations", in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report annually on the activities of the Ethics Office and the implementation of ethics policies. The report also includes information on the activities of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, as requested by the Assembly in resolution 63/250 on human resources management.

The present report covers the period from 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016. It also presents some developments in the services of the Ethics Office and trends in demands for those services over the past ten years since the creation of the Office in 2006.

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I. Introduction

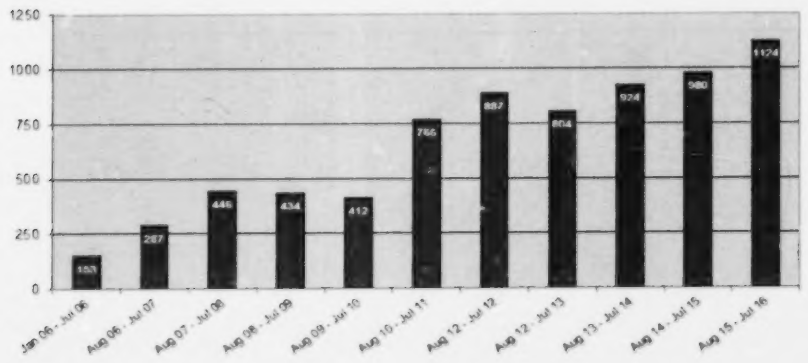
1. The United Nations Ethics Office marked its tenth anniversary through a broadcast message on i-Seek on the United Nations Public Service Day, 23 June 2016. The broadcast message celebrated the achievements of the international civil service and included a short message from the Secretary-General, who noted that "At the United Nations, ethics and integrity are of utmost importance to our work."[1] This commemoration was within the context of the Member States celebrating their public services as an institution, as decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/277. The present report not only provides an overview and assessment of the Ethics Office's activities from 1 August 2015 to 31 July 2016 but also highlights the Office's developments and achievements during the past ten years.

2. The Ethics Office was established by the Secretary-General as an independent office subsequent to the approval of the General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit (see Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 161 (d)). At that time, the creation of the Office was a part of "strengthening the United Nations" and "the Secretariat and management reform" to support Member States to achieve their vision in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

3. Since the Ethics Office began operations in 2006, it has seen an increase in demands for its services. The number of requests grew from 287 in 2006-2007 reporting period[2] to 1,124 during the current reporting period (see fig. I). There has been a corresponding increase in resources for the Office.

4. There has been an increase in coordination and coherence of ethics-related policies, procedures and activities within the United Nations system. The Secretary-General established the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (formerly the United Nations Ethics Committee) in December 2007 among applicable United Nations entities. In 2010, the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations was established to support the Secretary-General's efforts to promote collaboration on ethics-related issues within the United Nations-system entities, affiliated international organizations and international financial institutions.

Figure I
Overall requests for Ethics Office services, August 2006-July 2016



[1] https://iseek-newyork.un.org/article/celebrating-10th-anniversary-un-ethics-office

[2] This is the first comparable one-year reporting period, as the previous one covered seven months.

5. The present report, the eleventh[3] since the establishment of the Office, is being submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/254, paragraph 16 (i). The Assembly requested annual reporting on the activities of the Ethics Office and the implementation of ethics policies. During the present reporting period, the Ethics Office saw a change in leadership, with the new Director taking office on 8 September 2015. As required by its terms of reference, the Office continued to maintain its independence by having the head accountable to the Secretary-General and, as needed, access to information relevant to its work.[4]

II. Background and general information

6. Having commenced operations on 3 January 2006, and in accordance with Secretary-General's bulletins 2005/22 and 2007/11, the Ethics Office's functions include:

(a) Providing confidential advice and guidance to staff on ethical issues, including administering an ethics helpline;

(b) Administering the Organization's financial disclosure programme;

(c) Administering the Organization's protection against retaliation policy;

(d) Developing standards, training and education on ethics issues, in coordination with the Office of Human Resources Management and other offices, and conducting ethics outreach;

(e) Supporting ethics standard-setting and promoting coherence of policies and standards of the Secretariat and the Organization's funds and programmes.

7. The Ethics Office assists the Secretary-General in ensuring that staff members perform their functions consistent with the highest standards of integrity required by the Charter of the United Nations. It provides independent ethics advice and other services to the Secretariat's global staff population. The Office continues to engage with as many staff as possible through its website, dedicated ethics helpline and e-mail and outreach missions to multiple duty stations.

8. The Office designed and implemented the annual Secretariat-wide 2015 Leadership Dialogue and expanded ethics guidance and resource materials. The present report provides details on these initiatives and on the development of an online fraud prevention training course for staff members, incorporating guidance to staff in how to make better ethical choices and to raise fraud awareness. For the first time, the Ethics Office was invited to brief intergovernmental and other expert bodies and tribunals, beyond the Secretariat itself. It also continued to provide induction ethics briefings to top officials to assist them to set the "right tone at the top".

9. The present report also includes information on the activities of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (formerly the United Nations Ethics Committee), as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 63/250. In addition, it reports on the 2016 annual meeting of the Ethics Network for Multilateral Organizations.

[3] The reports include the initial one, covering the first seven months after the creation of the Ethics Office.

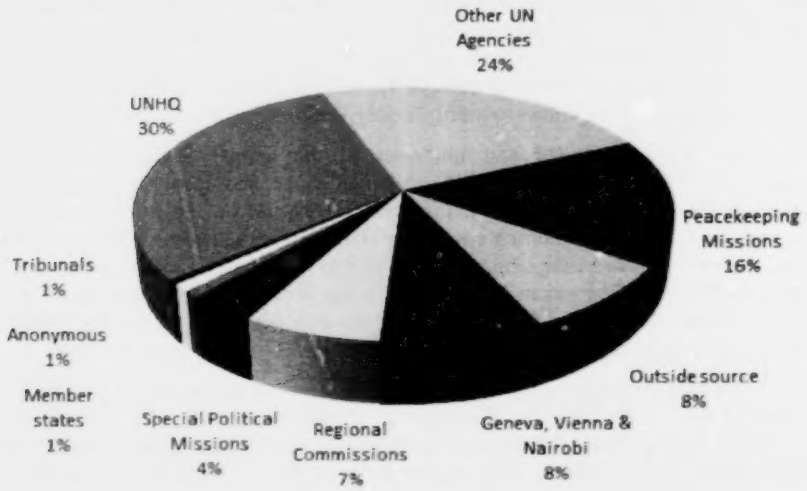
[4] See ST/SGB/2005/22, entitled "Ethics Office — establishment and terms of reference", sect. 5.

10. In collaboration with other departments, the Ethics Office has been engaged in a number of policy discussions, including recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Secretariat's protection against retaliation policy and finalizing a review of the regulatory framework governing the financial disclosure programme. To strengthen the independence, impartiality and confidentiality of the Ethics Office, it has also begun to review its own terms of reference and those of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, with member agencies.

11. Marking its ten years of operations, the Ethics Office began reviewing its own internal procedures for updating and improvement. They included information management and security and greater rigour in separating the advisory and protection against retaliation functions. They also included adding greater value in providing advice on procedures for determining corporate compliance, rather than transactional requests, and procurement ethics matters.

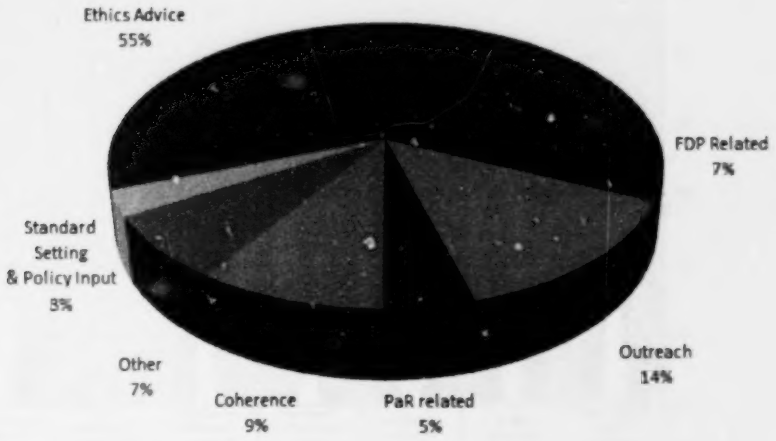
12. The Ethics Office provides services to staff of the Secretariat at duty stations in New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna, all regional commissions, peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and other designated offices. Although located in New York, the Ethics Office continues to receive a significant percentage of service requests from locations and entities away from headquarters (see fig. II below). Committed to providing quality, confidential ethics advice to all staff regardless of location, the Ethics Office continues to intensify its outreach efforts. In the reporting year, it conducted approximately 122 briefing sessions during its outreach visits to United Nations offices and agencies away from New York. These efforts to enhance global awareness of Ethics Office services may have contributed to increasing service requests over the past ten years.

Figure II
Service requests by source, 1 August 2015-31 July 2016



13. As depicted in figure III below, and reflecting the Ethics Office's comprehensive ethics service coverage, ethics advice continues to account for the majority of requests for services received by the Office. Ethics advice constituted 55 per cent of requests for services in the current cycle.

Figure III
Service requests by category, 1 August 2015-31 July 2016



III. Activities of the Ethics Office

A. Advice and guidance

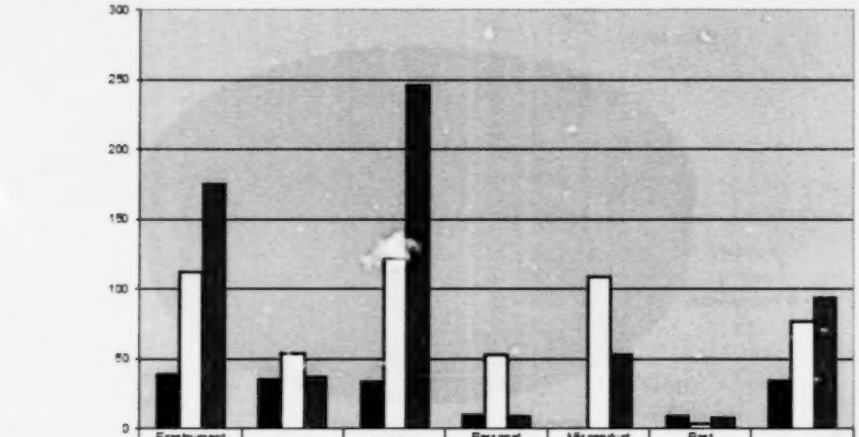
14. Public trust in the United Nations is an immeasurable asset that the Organization works hard to protect. Staff members contribute to its reputation through their daily decisions and interactions which can either enhance or diminish the Organization's standing. By providing staff members with ethical standards, training, and resources to get advice, the United Nations demonstrates a strong commitment to ethics and integrity at the organizational level.

15. The Ethics Office plays an important role in this organizational framework through its advisory function, which allows staff members to seek in confidence practical advice and guidance on ethical dilemmas arising from their work. By providing this service to individual staff members, staff groups, managers and departments, the Office empowers officials to recognize and make appropriate decisions consistent with the values and rules of the Organization. This advice is intended to prevent, mitigate and resolve actual or perceived conflicts of interest. In so doing, the reputation of the Organization and the integrity of its staff are safeguarded.

16. At this, its ten-year mark, the Office had received 622 requests for ethics advice as compared to 531 at the five-year mark and 163 enquiries at the one-year mark. As previously shown in figure III (service requests by category), 55 per cent of all enquiries received by the Office have been for ethics advice. As illustrated in figure IV

below, these concerns can be grouped under the following headings: outside activities (246 enquiries); misconduct reporting procedures (53 enquiries); other conflicts of interest (94 enquiries, including advice about procurement issues); personal investments and assets (9 enquiries); employment-related concerns (175 enquiries); gifts and hospitality (37 enquiries); and post-employment restrictions (8 enquiries).

Figure IV
Requests for ethics advice by cycle, August 2007, 2011 and 2016



	Employment related concerns	Gifts & Hospitality	Outside Activities	Personal Investments & Assets	Misconduct Reporting Procedure	Post Employment Restrictions	Other Conflict of Interest
Aug 2006 - July 2007	39	36	34	10		9	35
Aug 2010 - July 2011	112	54	122	53	109	4	77
Aug 2015 - July 2016	175	37	246	9	53	8	94

17. While ethics advice and guidance may involve clarifying or interpreting the Organization's standards concerning a prohibited or restricted activity, it can also address ethics issues that are not specifically dealt within existing regulations and policies and instead require a values-based evaluation. Based on the facts presented, the Office provides ethics advice and guidance on the appropriate course of action to ensure that the issue is resolved in the interest of the Organization. During the period under review, the Office has been consulted on a number of ethics-related concerns. The paragraphs below discuss some of the main areas of advice and demonstrate how the Office contributes to maintaining high standards of ethics, integrity and accountability.

18. Advice and guidance on outside activities involve the appraisal of proposed activities to be performed outside against those functions performed for the Organization. Staff members must ensure that their proposed outside activity does not bring into question their impartiality or independence. Almost 40 per cent of all requests for ethics advice concern outside activities. The Ethics Office has helped both staff and management to deal with potential conflicts arising from these outside activities.

19. Gifts, honours, decorations, favours or remuneration are complicated issues. Staff regulations and rules strictly limit the circumstances in which staff members

may accept gifts and honours. During the reporting period, 6 per cent of all ethics advice requests were related to those issues. Over the years, there has been a steady decline in enquiries under this category, perhaps owing to the promulgation of administrative instruction ST/AI/2010/1, entitled "Reporting, retaining and disposing of honours, decorations, favours, gifts or remuneration from governmental and non-governmental sources".

20. Requests for ethics advice under employment-related queries (28 per cent of requests for ethics advice) and misconduct reporting procedure (9 per cent of requests for ethics advice) involve staff seeking guidance on how to manage different situations that relate to their employment. Among other issues, they reflect concerns about recruitment, appointment and promotion processes; entitlements; and use of information or assets and they seek information on reporting abuse of authority, harassment and irregularities in administrative processes. The Office, in many cases, refers the staff member to the appropriate offices for assistance. Otherwise, it identifies other possible solutions and provides the Organization's rules, procedures and standards on the specific issue raised. This handling has reduced the potential for staff reporting the same grievance to multiple offices at the same time.

21. Personal investments and assets (1 per cent of requests for ethics advice) as well as other conflicts of interest situations (15 per cent of requests for ethics advice) occur when a staff member's private interests — such as outside professional relationships or personal financial assets — interfere with the proper discharge of their professional functions or obligations as a United Nations official. Many such requests for ethics advice have included situations that involved either actual, apparent or potential conflicts of interests.

22. The Ethics Office has also continued to provide independent advice to the Procurement Division, Department of Management, on issues related to the ethics, anti-corruption and corporate compliance programmes of vendors seeking to do business with the Organization. The Office worked closely with the Procurement Division to provide advice on third-party due diligence, reputational risk, and best practices in anti-corruption programmes. This line of advice began when the Organization realized the value added perspective of the independent Ethics Office on ethics issues related to vendor management.

B. Financial disclosure programme

23. The purpose of the Organization's financial disclosure programme is to protect the integrity and reputation of the Organization by identifying, managing and mitigating the risk of personal conflicts of interest. Designated staff members, including all staff at the D-1 level and above and those whose principal duties involve procurement and investment, are required to file annual disclosure statements. The review of statements is conducted by an independent external party.

24. During the 2015 annual filing cycle, covering the reporting period of 1 January to 31 December 2014, a total of 5,440 filers participated in the programme. Of that total, 1,238, or 22 per cent, of the filing population were first-time filers. As at the close of the 2015 cycle, 5,439 filers had submitted their disclosure statements and the programme had achieved 99.9 per cent compliance. (It should be noted that, of this total filer population, 100 per cent of the required United Nations Secretariat and peacekeeping personnel complied.)

25. The Ethics Office provided substantive and technical support to participating staff throughout the 2015 filing cycle that began on 1 March 2015. It responded to individual queries within 48 hours and followed up with participants until their issues were fully resolved. During the cycle, the Office communicated with filers by e-mail and telephone. The programme handled approximately 38,300 e-mail messages, the majority of which were related to technical support. A total of 23,300 were addressed by the Ethics Office and 15,000 by the programme's external reviewer. The Office continued its use of WebEx services to provide real-time system navigation assistance to new staff members and made further improvements to service provision and accessibility.

26. The Ethics Office provided briefings on the financial disclosure programme, including conflict-of-interest management, to filers and departmental focal points both at Headquarters and other locations, in person and via videoconference. During its outreach visits, the Office held customized briefings to staff located in peacekeeping missions, special political missions and other field offices. The briefings were a way for the Ethics Office to: (a) reach out to as many staff as possible; (b) facilitate compliance; and (c) raise awareness about conflict of interest and reputational risks and ways to manage them.

27. The verification of filer information ensured accuracy and completeness. During the 2015 filing cycle, 232 filers were selected for verification through random sampling. Verification procedures are in line with common principles and practices in public sector organizations.

28. During the 2015 cycle, the external reviewers identified 187 filers (3.4 per cent of the filer population) with a total of 194 items or activities that required review for managing potential conflicts of interest. Of those items, 27 related to financial holdings, 98 to outside activities, 63 to familial relationships and six (6) to other categories. These findings are consistent with those found in previous years. The programme's external reviewers, in consultation with the Ethics Office, issued individual recommendations directed at mitigating and managing all actual and potential conflicts of interest.

29. Since its inception in its current format in 2006, the programme has detected and managed 1,256 conflict-of-interest matters and kept in check conflict-of-interest and reputational risks to the Organization. It should further be noted that the filer population continues to grow over the years, from 1,704 filers in 2006 to 5,478 as at 31 July 2016. The numbers reflect the fact that, generally, about a quarter of the population is new or first-time filers and the workforce is mobile and located in operationally diverse environments.

30. In its resolution 63/250, the General Assembly endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that the Secretary-General provide data, by duty station, on: (a) the number of individuals covered by the programme; (b) the number of individuals who have complied with their filing obligations; (c) the number of individuals who have failed to comply with those obligations; and (d) the reasons for their failure to comply. Information concerning the 2015 financial disclosure programme by department or office may be found in the annex to the present report.

31. To enhance the vigour of the application supporting the financial disclosure programme and ensure robust data security, the Ethics Office is working closely

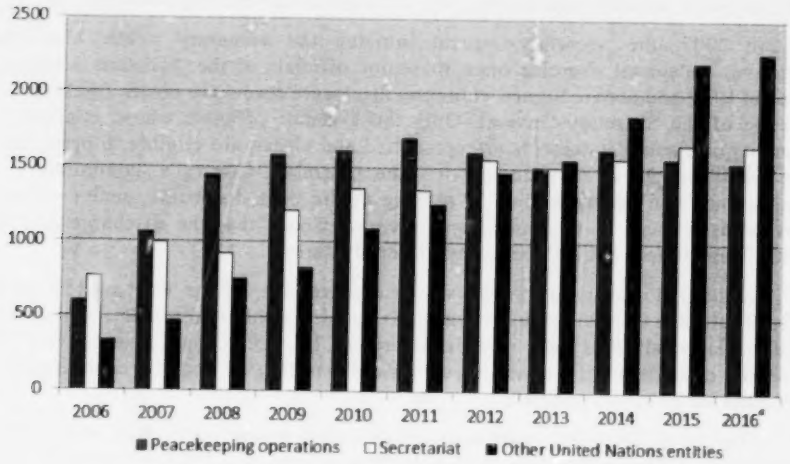
with the Office of Information and Communication Technology in developing a new information technology platform. It is expected that the new platform will benefit from the latest security features and will offer more user-friendly features.

32. In 2007, the Secretary-General initiated the voluntary public disclosure initiative, an annual exercise open to senior officials at the Assistant Secretary-General level and above. Signed voluntary disclosure forms are posted on the public website of the Secretary-General. Only those senior officials whose confidential financial disclosure statements are completed and closed are eligible to participate. The initiative is a key element of the Secretary-General's commitment to transparency and accountability. In making public their disclosure, senior officials provide assurances to the public and Member States that the discharge of their official functions is not influenced by personal interests.

33. In the 2015 voluntary public disclosure exercise, of the total of 152 senior officials eligible to participate, 111 officials opted to publicly disclose a summary of their assets, liabilities and outside interests. The 2015 participation rate has remained consistent with previous years, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the initiative by senior officials.

34. The 2016 financial disclosure programme filing cycle was successfully launched on 1 March 2016. As at 31 July 2016, a total of 5,478 staff members were enrolled. Figure V below provides a comparison of annual filing cycle participation levels by organizational grouping and the accompanying table depicts the numerical breakdown. As shown, the number of filers continues to increase over time, although at a slower rate than during the early years of the programme. Compared to a population of 1,704 filers in 2006, the current filer population represents a significant increase. While filers from the Secretariat and peacekeeping operations continue to constitute the majority of the total population, the number of filers from other United Nations system entities who participate in the United Nations financial disclosure programme on a cost-sharing basis has increased considerably from 339 in 2006 to 2,277 in 2016, as at 31 July.

Figure V
Financial disclosure participation by entity and filing year, 2006-2016



[a] As at 31 July 2016.

Financial disclosure participation by entity and filing year, 2006-2016

	Peacekeeping operations	*Secretariat*	*Other United Nations entities*	*Total by year*
2006	603	762	339	1 704
2007	1 062	997	469	2 528
2008	1 449	919	750	3 118
2009	1 584	1 212	822	3 618
2010	1 614	1 360	1 091	4 065
2011	1 697	1 351	1 258	4 306
2012	1 600	1 558	1 472	4 630
2013	1 508	1 505	1 560 [a]	4 573
2014	1 622	1 566	1 855	5 043
2015	1 564	1 666	2 210	5 440
2016[a]	1 543	1 658	2 277	5 478

[a] As at 31 July 2016.

35. As mentioned above, in addition to the Secretariat, the Ethics Office administers the financial disclosure programme for other United Nations system entities that opt to participate on a cost-sharing basis. They include United Nations entities with smaller filing populations, or those who opt to outsource their financial disclosure service to the United Nations Secretariat. This shared service provision contributed to facilitating a common approach and harmonized application of standards in managing conflicts of interest.

36. The Ethics Office also provides substantive guidance to other United Nations system entities in developing or strengthening their own programmes. This effort supported enhancing technical capacity and raised awareness of conflicts of interest among staff, particularly as the population of filers from other United Nations entities (see table) has continued to increase over recent cycles.

37. The review of the financial disclosure programme's regulatory framework continued during 2015-2016. The Working Group continued to review the following areas: (a) the programme's focus on conflicts of interest risks; (b) staff awareness; (c) scope of coverage; and (d) lessons learned from the experiences of other United Nations entities or national policies regarding conflicts of interest management and asset declaration systems. The ongoing review of the regulatory framework by the Secretariat is to enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of the programme to detect and manage risks of conflicts of interest for the Organization.

C. Protection of staff against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations

38. The Ethics Office administers Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2005/21, entitled "Protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations". In the wake of the 2005 World Summit Outcome and recognizing the importance of "whistle-blower" protection in promoting the reporting of fraud, corruption, and other serious forms of misconduct, the Secretariat's protection against retaliation policy was developed. It is an essential component of anti-corruption measures for United Nations operations, designed to encourage reports of potential wrongdoing and also serve as an internal accountability mechanism.

39. In accordance with ST/SGB/2005/21, the Ethics Office receives complaints of alleged retaliation and conducts preliminary reviews to determine if a complainant engaged in a protected activity and, if so, whether the protected activity was a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation. If the Office determines that a prima facie case of retaliation has been established, the matter is referred to the Office of Internal Oversight Services for investigation. The Ethics Office may recommend interim protection measures to safeguard the complainant and makes a determination based on its review of the investigation report and supporting evidence.

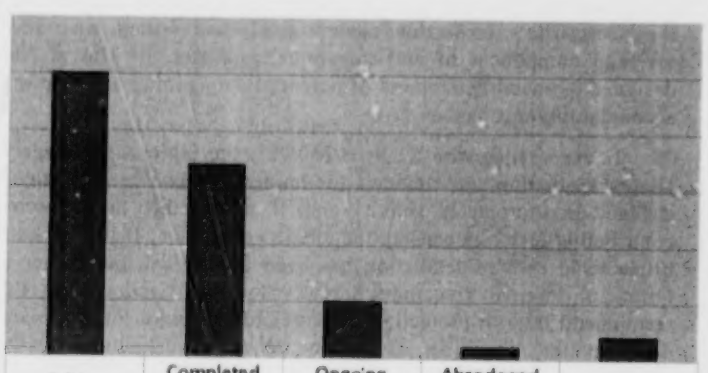
40. During the current reporting cycle, the Etnics Office received 50 enquiries under the protection against retaliation policy. Of these, 25 were requests for advice under the protection policy and not claims for protection while 2 were outside of the Office's jurisdiction. The submissions that fell outside of the jurisdiction of the Office were either because the claimant did not belong to the Secretariat or the agencies covered by the United Nations Ethics Office or because the submission was not a claim for protection but rather a report of misconduct or a workplace dispute. Staff members raising workplace concerns not covered by the policy were advised of other available resources and referred to appropriate offices, including the Ombudsman and Mediation Services, the Management Evaluation Unit, the Office of Staff Legal Assistance, and the Office of Human Resources Management. Staff members reporting on misconduct were directed to the appropriate channels.

41. The Office initiated 23 preliminary reviews in those cases where staff alleged retaliation in accordance with ST/SGB/2005/21. Of these, 17 reviews were completed, 5 were ongoing, and 1 claim was abandoned by the staff member, by the end of the reporting period. Of the 17 completed preliminary reviews, 11 claims did not present a prima facie case of retaliation. Regarding these cases, it was determined that either the complainant had not engaged in an activity protected by the policy (i.e. reported misconduct through an established channel, cooperated with a duly authorized audit or investigation), or the protected activity was not a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation. A majority of these cases concerned workplace disputes between the complainants and their colleagues or supervisors.

42. In six cases, the Ethics Office determined that there was a prima facie case that the protected activity was a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation. Of those, the Ethics Office recommended to the Secretary-General in four cases that interim measures be taken to safeguard the interests of the claimants, pending completion of the investigation. In the remaining two cases, upon consultation, the claimants did not seek interim protection measures. Six cases are pending investigations by the Office of Internal Oversight Services or are in the process of being referred to that Office.

Figure VI

Actions taken on protection against retaliation policy enquiries, 1 August 2015-31 July 2016

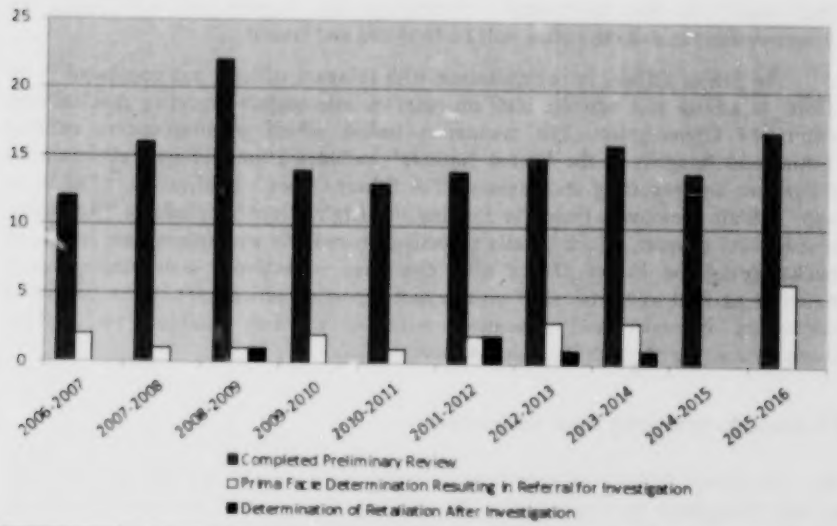


	Advice Provided	Completed Preliminary Review	Ongoing Preliminary Review	Abandoned Preliminary Review	No Jurisdiction
Aug-15 to July-16	25	17	5	1	2

43. From 1 August 2006 to 31 July 2016, the Ethics Office completed preliminary reviews on 153 claims for protection against retaliation, of which 21 were found to be prima facie cases in which the protected activity was determined to be a contributing factor in causing the alleged retaliation or threat of retaliation. Of the 21 prima facie cases, 5 were found to involve retaliation, 7 did not find retaliation, 6 are pending investigation, 1 was not investigated in the past by the Office of

Internal Oversight Services and a further 2 cases were resolved informally to the satisfaction of the claimant.[5]

Figure VII
Protection against retaliation statistics 2006-2016



	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016
Completed preliminary review	12	16	22	14	13	14	15	16	14	17[a]
Prima facie determination resulting in referral for investigation	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	3	0	6
Determination of retaliation after investigation	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	–[b]

[a] Does not include four ongoing preliminary reviews and one request abandoned by the staff member during the preliminary review stage.

[b] Pending investigation results.

[5] There results correspond with those of comparable organizations. The World Bank's Office of Ethics and Business Conduct closed a total of 261 cases in the fiscal year 2013, of which 5 (or 2 per cent) were retaliation cases. In the fiscal year 2012, that Office closed a total of 278 cases, of which 8 (or 3 per cent) were retaliation cases. And in the fiscal year 2011, the Office closed a total of 287 cases, of which 7 (or 2 per cent) were retaliation cases. Similarly, the Swiss Federal Audit Office, the Swiss Federal Administration's contact point for "whistle-blowers", reported receiving 64 impropriety reports in 2015, of which 2 (or 3 per cent) were transmitted to the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland. In Canada, the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner referred six cases of reprisals to the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Tribunal since 2011-2012. The United States Office of Special Counsel, in the fiscal year 2014, closed 4,666 cases, of which 8 (or 0.17 per cent) involved protecting "whistle-blowers" from retaliation. (See UN Special, July-August 2016 edition at: www.unspecial.org/2016/07/the-un-whistleblower-protection-policy-2/.)

44. In the reporting period, the Ethics Office continued to participate in and advise an ad hoc working group established by the Staff-Management Committee to make recommendations for revising the policy on protection against retaliation. During the year, a proposed revised policy was presented to the Committee and reviewed by the working group. Composed of staff and management representatives, the working group is currently in the final stages of its deliberations and will then prepare its final report to the Committee. Thereafter, the Committee will make its recommendations and the policy will be finalized and issued.

45. The Ethics Office, in collaboration with relevant offices, has continued in its efforts to advise and educate staff on relevant misconduct reporting mechanisms within the Organization. The mandatory online ethics training course entitled "Ethics and Integrity at the United Nations" includes a module on staff reporting obligations and reporting mechanisms. The Ethics Office's publication, "The Road map: A Staff Member's Guide to Finding the Right Place" includes a "Reporting misconduct" chapter, which details reporting procedures and appropriate reporting mechanisms. The Ethics Office also continues to actively distribute outreach materials as well as advise staff on relevant reporting procedures in the course of conducting outreach and education missions to duty stations away from headquarters, and through its ethics advice.

D. Outreach, training and education

46. The Ethics Office continued to provide outreach, training and education services to staff throughout the Organization. By striving to reach staff and raise awareness, the Ethics Office fulfils its mandate of identifying and addressing ethics-related concerns across the Organization, thereby strengthening a shared ethical culture. In addition, for the first time, the Office presented specialized ethics briefings to intergovernmental and expert bodies and tribunals, beyond the Secretariat.

47. Pursuant to this mandate, the Ethics Office conducted outreach missions to the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (Juba), the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei, the United Nations Regional Service Centre (Entebbe), the United Nations Mission in Liberia, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, United Nations Logistics Base/Global Services Centre, the United Nations Office in Geneva (including the Economic Commission for Europe) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (Syrian Arab Republic).

48. During these missions, the Ethics Office provided outreach and advisory services. The Ethics Office held town hall meetings, provided guidance on conflicts of interest issues to managers and confidential ethics advice to individual staff members, and conducted tailored ethics briefings and presentations to main offices and field location offices.

49. As recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 65/247, the Ethics Office conducted ethics induction briefings for senior leaders. The

briefings, held upon request by the incoming senior officials, are intended to assist the "tone at the top", positively influencing the Organization's culture of ethics, integrity and accountability. The Director conducted 14 ethics induction briefings with newly appointed Assistant Secretaries-General and Under-Secretaries-General, including Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. The briefings addressed personal ethical responsibility, recognizing and proactively seeking advice to manage potential conflicts of interest, retaliation prevention and protecting staff from retaliation, encouraging a "speaking up" culture, and transparency and accountability practices.

50. In coordination with the Department of Political Affairs, the Ethics Office additionally provided six ethics briefings for incoming members of various panels of experts. The briefings enhance awareness of the United Nations ethical expectations on the part of contracted experts conducting essential work for the Organization.

51. During the reporting period, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and the Ethics Office launched the 2015 leadership dialogue, "Fulfilling our mission: taking individual responsibility". The leadership dialogue programme provides an annual opportunity for staff and managers at headquarters and field locations to engage in a one-hour discussion on ethics and integrity issues. Focused on the importance of personal responsibility and accountability on the part of all staff members in achieving the goals and mission of the Organization, the 2015 leadership dialogue topic was selected in response to strong staff interest in the topics of good management and effective and trustworthy organizational practices.

52. The Ethics Office, in collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Department of Management, is currently developing the 2016 leadership dialogue as a discussion guide on fraud awareness and prevention. The Ethics Office is also developing, in conjunction with the Office of Human Resources Management and the two aforementioned offices, an e-learning programme on fraud awareness and prevention that will address in more detail the levels of anti-fraud awareness and prevention required of all staff members.

53. In hosting materials such as the leadership dialogue guides, the ethics guide, and the road map, the Ethics Office website continues to provide essential information on ethical values and standards to both United Nations personnel and the general public. During 2015-2016, the website received approximately 140,000 page views and 105,000 unique page views. Available via i-Seek and www.un.org/en/ethics (as well as the sites of the other official languages of the United Nations), the website contains comprehensive materials, links, and other information relating to ethics.

54. During the reporting period, the Ethics Office actively implemented further outreach initiatives by launching a holiday broadcast on gifts to guide and advise staff members on the appropriate actions to take in terms of reporting gifts. The communications serve to renew the knowledge and understanding of staff members of the purpose, mandate and goals of the Ethics Office and the essential role of staff members in embodying the values and integrity of the Organization.

E. Standard-setting and policy support

55. Developing standards and providing policy advice and support are among the core mandates of the Ethics Office. The Office continued to provide significant assistance to other departments/offices and various United Nations entities in developing policies and standards pertaining to ethics and integrity, including issues relating to institutional integrity, individual integrity and process integrity, which are often intertwined.

56. Notably, the Ethics Office regularly and actively provides policy advice to various offices regarding standards governing staff conduct and conflict of interest vetting. This ranged from providing comments on policy provisions, recommending draft standards on ethics and integrity for integration into broader policy frameworks, to formulating questions for the purpose of vetting conflicts of interest. The Office provided input on various policy issues, such as vendor management, anti-fraud and corruption framework, conflict-of-interest aspects in environmental governance, code of ethics and/or code of conduct for different categories of personnel, pre-appointment vetting for potential conflicts of interest for senior appointments and terms and conditions for certain types of external engagement by the Organization and its staff in an official capacity.

57. As alluded to above, the Office actively participated in the development of the Organization's policy framework on fraud awareness and prevention, led by the Department of Management. It provided comments on related questionnaires and policy reviews by various offices or entities.

58. The Office further examined options and provided advice on potential risk areas involving certain types of personnel and their contractual arrangements, so as to minimize reputational risk to the Organization while enhancing the Organization's ability to tap into their special skills and expertise, which are valuable to the Organization. It provided assistance to other offices in revising their policies and procedures on personal investments, on induction/onboarding procedures for integrity requirements and on staff conduct and conflicts of interest prevention.

59. The Ethics Office provided guidance to field offices, peacekeeping missions and regional commissions regarding outside activities, the use of social media, ethics training, and conflicts of interest prevention and mitigation, especially as they relate to field staff. It collaborated with other Secretariat departments in examining the management and disposal of gifts, honours, decorations and favours to staff members in terms of mitigating reputational risk to the Organization. In particular, the Ethics Office supported the Department of Management in the finalization of an online gift registry.

60. The Ethics Office also participated in the sixth session of the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, upon the invitation of the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, to contribute to the overall standard-setting and development of policy issues. It hosted two round-table discussions with senior personnel of the World Bank's Office of Ethics and Business Conduct, a local government office and other Secretariat offices to exchange experience and examine common ethics and integrity policy issues as well as their implications.

61. In relation to requirements under new public sector accounting standards, the Ethics Office provided significant support in developing a relevant methodology for vetting key management personnel for conflicts of interest, relating to third-party transactions. The Office has successfully completed two review cycles.

62. In sum, the Ethics Office provided significant technical assistance to various United Nations entities in developing policies and procedures regarding safeguarding staff conduct and integrity issues. Notably, the Ethics Office provided policy advice in the areas of financial disclosure, conflict of interest management, and protection against retaliation. Through this support, the Ethics Office contributed to ethics policy development and integrity capacity-building within United Nations entities.

IV. Ethics Panel of the United Nations and the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations

63. The Ethics Panel of the United Nations, established in December 2007 as the United Nations Ethics Committee and renamed in April 2013, is mandated to create a unified set of ethical standards and policies for the Secretariat and separately administered organs and programmes. It further consults on important and complex ethics matters, having system-wide implications. The Panel is chaired by the Director of the Ethics Office.

64. The Ethics Panel is composed of the heads of the ethics offices of the funds and programmes and the Secretariat. Pursuant to Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2007/11, the Ethics Office provides ethics services to the staff of those separately administered organs and programmes that have not yet designated an Ethics Officer.

65. In the course of the reporting period, the Ethics Panel met in 11 formal sessions. In addition, its members regularly consulted one another on a wide range of issues having implications for its member organizations. The Ethics Panel continued to focus on enhancing coherence and consistency in the application of ethics standards, and reviewed lessons learned from the implementation of its core mandates. The Panel further reviewed the annual reports prepared by member ethics offices.

66. During 2015-2016, the Ethics Panel members devoted a large part of their attention and effort to the review of relevant policies pertaining to or having significant implications for their core mandated areas. These include the terms of reference of the Ethics Office, the policy on system-wide application of ethical standards which established the Ethics Panel of the United Nations, and the Secretariat's policies on protection against retaliation and the financial disclosure programme. It also reviewed issues relating to the independence and accountability of an ethics office, based on lessons learned from recent related developments.

67. The Panel developed a common approach to ethics training and a common presentation for use in outreach visits, guidance on the use of social media, ethics office data security and confidentiality, harmonizing data collection for reporting purposes, provision of advice on outside activities, gifts and honours, and ethics office strategic plans. The Panel also identified and deliberated on emerging ethical challenges, posing risks to the Organization. The Panel consulted, inter alia, on matters concerning reputational risk management, organizational and personal

conflicts of interest, thereby contributing to the harmonized and consistent application of ethical standards across member organizations and entities.

68. During the reporting period and pursuant to relevant provisions of section 4.3 of ST/SGB/2007/11, the Chair of the Panel consulted its members in her independent review of two matters referred to the Chair by concerned staff members from their respective funds or programmes. The ethics offices of the respective funds and programmes were recused from these consultations.

69. The Ethics Panel continues to play an essential role as the sole mandated and formalized mechanism in the field of ethics and integrity in the United Nations system and the broader intergovernmental and international organization family. It has proven to be an effective tool in helping to promote the coherent application of ethical standards. In enhancing harmonized ethics and integrity policies and practices among member organizations, the Ethics Panel plays a vital role in fostering a "United Nations identity" based on integrity and accountability. Through promoting an organizational culture of ethics and integrity within the international civil service, the Ethics Panel has reaffirmed its impact in advocating and forging healthier institutions with unwavering integrity and acts as a primary mechanism for promoting policy coherence.

70. The United Nations Ethics Office and Ethics Panel members continued to participate in the activities of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations. The Network was established in June 2010 in support of the Secretary-General's efforts to promote system-wide collaboration on ethics-related issues within the United Nations family. Serving as a broad forum of ethics functions from United Nations-system entities, affiliated international organizations, and international financial institutions, the Network provides support for professional development, benchmarking, and the exchange of ethics policies and practices. The Network's membership has recently expanded with the participation of intergovernmental organizations and financial institutions having consultative and collaborative arrangements with the United Nations system. This growth has contributed to a more extensive exchange of experience and lessons learned in the delivery of ethics services in multilateral organizations. The eighth meeting of the Network was held in Madrid from 12 to 15 July 2016, and was hosted by the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

71. Enhancing collaboration with and supporting United Nations system entities and other international organizations, the Ethics Office responded to multiple ethics advice, policy, and information requests from them. The Ethics Office provided technical assistance to the World Intellectual Property Organization upon the latter's request. This assistance included technical advice, ethics briefings and experience-sharing. Advice and guidance to other entities included the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Pan American Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations University, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the World Health Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, the Special Tribunal for

Lebanon, the United Nations Volunteers, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.

V. Observations and conclusions

72. Since the creation of the United Nations Ethics Office in 2006, there is a greater awareness and articulation of the ethical risks to the Organization on the part of staff and management. The Organization has defined more precisely for staff the concept of conflicts of interest in staff regulations and rules and has communicated the necessity of mitigating such conflicts to safeguard the independence and impartiality of the international civil service. The Office has contributed to the daily observance of the Oath of Office by staff. It has also recognized that guarding against reputational risks in third-party dealings requires due diligence and proactive management of its business partner relationships.

73. As envisioned by the General Assembly in 2005 at the World Summit, the Ethics Office has actively implemented its mandate of assisting the Secretary-General to promote a culture of ethics, transparency and accountability. In so doing, the Office was a key element of the management reform and strengthening the Secretariat to support Member States to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

74. Ten years later, the Member States have forged the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, crystallized into the Sustainable Development Goals. The Secretariat itself and those United Nations agencies involved in the development pillar have been considering ways to make themselves more fit for purpose for this new agenda as well as other priorities.

75. Reflecting the importance of a strong ethics function for the future, during the reporting period the Ethics Office received 1,124 requests for ethics services. This figure constitutes the highest number of requests received in the history of the Office. Highlights of the period include: responding to 622 confidential ethics advice requests; managing the 2015 cycle of the financial disclosure programme, involving the review of 5,440 disclosure files; undertaking 155 outreach, training, and education activities; responding to 50 enquiries concerning the Secretariat's protection against retaliation policy; and administering the 2015 leadership dialogue initiative.

76. Since its inception, the Office has increased its global outreach efforts to reach offices away from Headquarters, peacekeeping and field missions, special political missions, and regional commissions. These efforts are essential to preventing, mitigating, and managing ethical and reputational risk within the Organization. The commitment of the Ethics Office and its interaction with staff, regardless of location, consistently demonstrates a strong staff demand for counselling, consultation, and guidance on ethics and integrity issues.

77. In the course of its work, the Ethics Office remains a leading advocate for the values and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Ethics Office considers important the lessons learned from ethical issues raised in the past ten years and the need to ensure an approach to ethics outreach and communication that meets the needs of stakeholders across the Organization. By directly engaging with staff and other stakeholders on these values, and in promoting adherence to the

highest standards of efficiency, competency, and integrity, the Ethics Office serves a distinctive and indispensable role within the Organization.

78. In an operating environment that is marked by increasing complexity, the United Nations faces new and increasing challenges. The proliferation of stakeholders in its work; innovations in technology that impact how the world communicates and conducts business; and new human, physical and cyber security risks call for a United Nations served by an international civil service, fit for purpose.

79. Looking ahead, the Ethics Office needs to strengthen its independence. At the same time, the Office needs to continue working with other offices in fulfilling its mandate and staying on message. A reminder of service to the public will assist to rally staff to recommit themselves to the vision and purpose of the United Nations. The upcoming transition in leadership with the new Secretary-General will be a critical opportunity for demonstration of an ethical "tone at the top".

80. In the course of this work, an increasing need has emerged to ensure coherence and comparability of Ethics Office reporting in terms of human resource goals and results across the Organization and the funds and programmes. Following the establishment of the Ethics Office in January 2006 and in response to the General Assembly's request for reporting on the activities of the Ethics Office, the Secretary-General has to date submitted his annual report on the basis of a reporting cycle of 1 August to 31 July. While continuing to adhere to the requirement for annual reporting to the General Assembly, and for the benefit of harmonization and comparability, the Secretary-General wishes to bring to the attention of the General Assembly his intention to adjust the annual reporting cycle from the midyear time frame to the calendar year cycle, that is, covering the period from 1 January to 31 December. As a transitional step, the next annual report of the Secretary-General to the Assembly will cover the period from 1 August 2016 to 31 December 2017 (instead of 31 July 2017) and will be submitted in 2018. Thereafter, the next annual report covering a full calendar year will be submitted in 2019.

81. **The General Assembly is requested to take note of the present report, including the adjustment in the annual reporting cycle.**

Annex

Financial disclosure programme compliance level, 2015

United Nations entity	*Required filers*	*Completed filings*	*Non-compliant(s)*
United Nations Secretariat			
Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions secretariat	2	2	–
United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination secretariat	3	3	–
Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate	4	4	–
Department for General Assembly and Conference Management	26	26	–
Department of Economic and Social Affairs	52	52	–
Department of Management	249	249	–
Department of Political Affairs, including special political missions	403	403	–
Department of Public Information	38	38	–
Department of Safety and Security	19	19	–
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	53	53	–
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	34	34	–
Economic Commission for Africa	122	122	–
Economic Commission for Europe	9	9	–
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	66	66	–
Ethics Office	11	11	–
Executive Office of the Secretary-General	15	15	–
International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda	21	21	–
International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia	33	33	–
Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals	27	27	–
Office for Disarmament Affairs	5	5	–
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	31	31	–
Office of Administration of Justice	2	2	–
Office of Internal Oversight Services	11	11	–
Office of Legal Affairs	20	20	–
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	18	18	–
Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services	3	3	–
Office of the President of the General Assembly	4	4	–
Office of the Special Adviser on Africa	4	4	–
Office of the Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan	2	2	–
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region	3	3	–
Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflicts	1	1	–
Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict	3	3	–

United Nations entity	*Required filers*	*Completed filings*	*Non-compliant(s)*
Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children	1	1	–
Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States	4	4	–
Peacebuilding Support Office	4	4	–
Regional Commissions New York Office	1	1	–
Special Court for Sierra Leone	1	1	–
Special Envoy on Ebola	2	2	–
Special Tribunal for Lebanon	28	28	–
United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund	73	73	–
United Nations Office to the African Union	5	5	–
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	22	22	–
United Nations Office at Geneva	85	85	–
United Nations Office at Nairobi	49	49	–
United Nations Office at Vienna	15	15	–
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	82	82	–
Subtotal (excluding peacekeeping operations)	**1 666**	**1 666**	–
Peacekeeping operations	1 564	1 564	–
United Nations bodies/agencies and others	2 210	2 209	1
Total	**5 440**	**5 439**	**1**